

October 16,
2013

SHEBOYGAN COUNTY SCHOOLS

Dear Members of the Select Committee for Review of the Common Core State Standards:

Thank you for the opportunity to address you regarding this very important issue. I am Christopher Peterson and I serve as the superintendent for the Howards Grove School District. I am humbled and honored to be here representing the school districts in Sheboygan County, including Howards Grove, Elkhart Lake–Glenbeulah, Random Lake, Sheboygan, Cedar Grove–Belgium, Kohler, Sheboygan Falls, Northern Ozaukee, Plymouth, and Oostburg. Collectively, we represent over 230 years educating young people in Wisconsin.

There has been talk lately about the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and whether our state should continue with their adoption. There have been many challenges that are being brought out against them. As educators, we are incredibly frustrated to hear and read some of the misinformation that is circulating related to these standards and, quite frankly, most of the criticism regarding the Common Core is simply without merit.

It seems that those with specific agendas and often very little accurate information are working to create fear around something they don't seem to understand. Information regarding the Common Core State Standards and how they were developed, when they were adopted, and who was involved, is readily available on the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Website. I strongly encourage all concerned citizens to read the detailed "Facts vs. Myths" page.

The realities of the Common Core Standards are that they have provided a higher level of rigor, relevance and expectations for our students. The misinformation that the CCSS have lower expectations is completely unfounded. Our work in Sheboygan County Schools with the Smarter Balanced pilot test confirms the CCSS expectations are

higher than anything which we had used before. The CCSS are more rigorous than any of Wisconsin's previous standards. They continue to promote and expand upon creative and critical thinking skills essential for our children who will enter a global competitive workforce.

The CCSS are clear benchmarks, specific at each grade level. Teachers are able to collaborate within and across academic disciplines to engage student learning. The CCSS are aligned with college and career expectations. Students will be better equipped for college and the demands placed upon them as they enter the workforce.

It is ironic that some of those most critical of low standards in the past are now finding ways to be critical of the CCSS for the opposite reason.

The CCSS are standards. They provide a general framework which defines proficiencies expected of our students to be college and career ready. They are a-political. There seems to be great confusion that the CCSS dictates to each school district a specific curriculum, thus taking away local control. This is not the case. Curriculum determines how we implement the standards. Each state and individual district has complete autonomy to select whatever curriculum it desires to meet their particular needs. The CCSS do not dictate any specific textbook, resource, or material. For example, in Sheboygan County alone, you will find a diverse selection of textbook series and materials used to address the standards that are unique to different districts. Those types of curriculum decisions are left completely to individual districts. Logic alone dictates that having common standards across the majority of states will allow for collaborative efforts to build resources in a way that could never be accomplished before. This is a huge advantage in the CCSS. We are already seeing tremendous benefit from this through the resources from which we can select as we implement curriculum.

Several years of work have been invested to align standards and benchmarks to help determine what our children need in terms of college and career readiness. This has been a long and thoughtful process involving business, government, and educational leaders from this state and across the country. We have made adjustments already to both the adoption of the CCSS and in response to the state's new test, the Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA), and the ACT suite of tests given to our high school students. Our work is to have children become college and/or career ready, and our

goal, as always, is to exceed any baseline standards. The School Districts in Sheboygan County fully support the increased rigor of the CCSS and will work to implement them to enhance what we do for children every day. Our hope is that the implementation of these Common Core Standards is just the beginning of a long arrangement of continual improvement as we have been accustomed to in the past. Adjusting and accepting change is always difficult for people. The easy thing to do is to do nothing. This is not the choice we, the leaders and teachers in our schools, have made. We have moved forward to implement the Common Core because it is in the best interest of our students and our communities. We have chosen not to do what is easy, but to do what is right. We hope to also have your support so together we can continue to move forward.

Sincerely,

Christopher Peterson
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